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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000894

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: PROTESTS - OPPOSITION APPEARS TO STEP  
BACK, SAYS OPEN TO DIALOGUE

REF: TBILISI 0876

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: On May 7, a day after violence erupted when opposition protesters charged a police station, non-parliamentary opposition leaders indicated a new willingness to engage in dialogue, although they did not present a united message. Irakli Alasania (Alliance) called for dialogue without preconditions. Others like Nino Burjanadze called for dialogue, but only to discuss Saakashvili's resignation. The non-parliamentary leaders as a group issued a joint statement that called for a meeting with Saakashvili, but also reaffirmed their demand for regime change. The turnout for protests was slightly higher than normal with 3000-5000 briefly attending a rally in front of Parliament which quickly broke up due to heavy rain. The non-parliamentary opposition's plans remain unclear, some have indicated that protests and blocking roads will continue as scheduled, others have remained mum. Speaker Bakradze announced that he was trying to schedule a preliminary discussion on May 8 with Irakli Alasania and any other opposition leader willing to take part; at mid-day May 8 the non-parliamentary opposition was reportedly meeting to decide how to respond to Bakradze's offer. President Saakashvili is in Prague at the EU Eastern Partnership Summit and is due to return to Tbilisi early May 9. End Summary.

12. (C) Comment: We have the impression that at least some non-parliamentary leaders were shocked that they had "lost control of the mob" when more radical leaders attempted to enter a police station by force May 6, apparently on their own initiative and led by the Gachechiladze brothers. The non-parliamentary opposition seems in disarray and unsure how to recover and regroup from the police station incident. Fissures are becoming more apparent with hard-liners conceding little, Alasania apparently ready to deal and others still on the fence. Hard-liners among the group will certainly try to rein in the moderates and continue along the path to confrontation; however, any public statements expressing an increased openness to dialogue, is a net positive. We continue to push for all sides to engage in meaningful dialogue, abide by the law and avoid violence. End Comment.

Protest Numbers Increase Slightly

13. (C) After the May 6 violence, the number of protesters who attended the daily "meeting" in front of the Parliament increased from 1000-2000 to 3000-5000. Embassy observers said the crowd was much more diverse than normal, in contrast with the usual "rent-a-crowd". The increased numbers both in the late evening on May 6, and on May 7, tend to indicate that the confrontation galvanized at least some supporters who had not been regularly attending the protests. At the rally, the non-parliamentary opposition issued a joint statement that expressed a willingness to meet with

Saakashvili to present him with their position on how to overcome the crisis. They reiterated their demand for Saakashvili's resignation and blamed Saakashvili's "irresponsible and provocative actions" for the escalation of violence. The statement was read by Gubaz Sanikidze (National Forum). The non-parliamentary opposition leaders urged supporters to hold a large scale rally on May 9 to mark the one month anniversary of the protests. No further plans were announced.

#### Alasania Says Dialogue Without Preconditions

14. (C) Alasania sent out a statement expressing his desire to start talks saying that the "meeting should be held without preconditions if we want to achieve real results." No other non-parliamentary leaders have joined in his statement. Nino Burjanadze (Democratic Movement - United Georgia) said that she was ready to meet the President but only to discuss his resignation. She added that she would not obstruct others among the non-parliamentary group from speaking with the GoG but did not see the point in discussing other issues. Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way) demanded that Saakashvili "wake up and realize what is going on and meet with them." Speaker Bakradze responded to Alasania's statement for meeting without preconditions. He indicated that he would like to hold a meeting on March 8 with any opposition member willing to engage in a serious discussion rather than to simply deliver ultimatums.

#### Three Youth Activists Allege Mistreatment in Custody

15. (SBU) According to the press, the three opposition activists accused of beating a Georgia Public Broadcaster journalist held a press conference May 7, alleging that they were beaten up, threatened and verbally abused by police

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during their detention. We asked the Ministry of Internal Affairs for a response since its May 7 statement alleged that the detainees were not injured during their detention. We've also reiterated our request for information regarding other reported cases of opposition activists beaten during the protests.

TEFFT